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Michael Ledeen's Grave New World

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"They have a whole society that does not work," Michael Ledeen says. "And those parts of it that do work are all illegal. I frankly do not believe that the Soviet empire could survive, were it not for Western assistance."

He continues. "The economic system is a shambles. And a footnote: One of the curious things about all this great press Gorbachev is getting is that no one bothers to point out that he was minister of agriculture" before his elevation to the supreme position of power in the Soviet Union.

But wait, there's more. Agriculture "is the greatest catastrophe they've ever had. Russia was the world's greatest grain exporter before the Revolution and is today the world's greatest grain importer. That's quite an achievement. And part of it is due to Gorbachev."

Michael Ledeen is unhappy with the Soviet Union, and he's not very happy with the swanky Jean-Pierre restaurant, either. It's lunchtime at Jean-Pierre. Mr. Ledeen, 43 — author, Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies, consultant to the State Department, the Defense Department, and the National Security Council, and once special adviser to former Secretary of State

Alexander Haig — has just finished a heated but friendly argument with the maitre d' over the merits of tarragon.

Mock-obstinately, they have agreed to disagree, and as a waiter is bringing Mr. Ledeen his first course — without its usual tarragon-laced dressing — he turns to his favorite — or least favorite, depending on how you look at it — subject, the internal crisis in the Soviet Union.

There was, it seems, a factory in the Soviet city of Cheboksary, where heavy earth movers were built. "They wanted to build these huge earth movers. The first thing to be said is that the current world market

for these things is about 850 units a year. The Soviets wanted to build a factory that would produce 40,000 a year.

"They designed this thing — this huge tractor — and they hired Western companies to design the machines to build it, which they did. And they built a few exemplars.

"So far as I can tell, not one of them has ever worked. The thing is so heavy that nine times out of ten the blade — within about 10 yards of leaving the factory — or the tires collapse, or the shocks go, or the whole thing just caves in.

"It's just a catastrophe. It's like a Walt Disney cartoon where one of these monstrous devices just slowly comes apart, springs popping out.

"That's really the Soviet empire."

But lest those who oppose the Soviet empire think they are about to have an easy time of it, Mr. Ledeen hastens to explain that this is less than half the story.

In the Soviet Union, he says, "You have a combination of structural crisis and great military strength. And that's the most dangerous of all situations.

"If they were militarily weaker, if we still had the kind of strategic superiority we had in the 1960s... we could view this crisis with considerable equanimity.

"No longer so today." Because of their internal failures, he says, "the Kremlin desperately and urgently wants visible signs of victory with regard to the United States."

And to Mr. Ledeen's mind, it is by no means clear that the United States is capable of preventing such victories. "The United States isn't serious about foreign policy. It does not have the people and the traditions in the area of foreign policy to permit us to design and then manage a serious, durable foreign policy.

"American history," he says, "contributes a great deal" to this lack of seriousness. "The fact that we've been isolated for so long, we don't have hostile neighbors on our borders — we've never been compelled to think in realistic terms about foreign policy except when we're attacked."

And since the prospect of a direct military clash between the United States and the Soviet Union is not the most likely threat this nation faces — but rather a gradual, indirect erosion of its strategic position — it's likely that more realistic thinking, in Mr. Ledeen's view, may never be forthcoming.

I has the title of Mr. Ledeen's new book, "Grave New World: The Superpower Crisis of the 1980s," just published by Oxford University Press. In it, as now over lunch, Mr. Ledeen argues that the current world situation is perilous indeed, for both the United States and the Soviet Union. The ongoing structural crisis in the Soviet Union, combined with the failure of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, has made for a world full of uncertainty and danger.

"The world is becoming more dangerous because neither we nor the Russians know what we're doing," he says. "And therefore, the rest of the world finds us unpredictable."

Of the smaller countries of the world, "The crazy things they would never have undertaken some years ago," when the United States and the Soviet Union were each more in control of their destinies, "suddenly become thinkable. And so they start in on all kinds of crazy adventures and say to themselves, well, if the superpowers don't like it, we'll hear from them and there will be time to change our minds."

The result, he says, is "a kind of Balkanization of the world, where little countries start to drive the big countries. The clearest proof of this is that you now have tiny countries with global foreign policies. You have Cuba, you have Libya, you have Israel — there's a whole series of tiny little countries to which the whole world reacts. Tails wagging dogs."

"Grave New World" is already provoking impassioned reaction, especially from critics on the Left. But even Timothy Garton Ash, the foreign editor of the politically eclectic English weekly, *The Spectator*, was moved, in an otherwise negative review in *The New Republic*, to call the book "a fine introduction to that part of an America ideological shift generally (but unhelpfully) known as neoconservatism."

Mr. Ledeen is indeed possessed of solid neoconservative credentials. He is a frequent contributor to *Commentary* magazine, and once wrote a regular feature on the press for *The American Spectator*. More broadly, the dust jacket of "Grave New World" is sanctioned by former Secretary of State Haig; former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick; her successor-designate, Vernon A. Wal-

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